

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 00138 080022Z

63

ACTION OES-04

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-06 IO-10 ISO-00 AEC-05 CIEP-01 FEA-01

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 4774

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USAEC GERMANTOWN

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USMISSION IAEA VIENNA

AMCONSUL BRISBANE BY POUCH

AMCONSUL PERTH BY POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 138

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: EARL, TECH, ENRG, AS

SUBJ: URANIUM ENRICHMENT: REPORTED TRIPARTITE INTEREST
IN AUSTRALIAN PLANT

REF: A. CANBERRA 7315 (NOTAL)

B. CANBERRA 7198 (NOTAL)

1. LOCAL PRESS REPORTS FROM JOURNALISTS ACCOMPANYING
PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM ON HIS CURRENT EUROPEAN TOUR
HAVE INDICATED VERY STRONG DUTCH, WEST GERMAN AND
BRITISH INTEREST IN A JOINT TRIPARTITE-AUSTRALIAN
URANIUM ENRICHMENT PLANT IN AUSTRALIA. REPORTEDLY,
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PAGE 02 CANBER 00138 080022Z

TRIPARTITE GROUP IS EAGER TO SUPPLY FINANCING AS WELL

AS URENCO CENTRIFUGE TECHNOLOGY FOR SUCH A PLANT IN EXCHANGE FOR "VERY SUBSTANTIAL" AMOUNTS OF ENRICHED URANIUM. IMPLICATION IS THAT AUSTRALIANS LEARNED OF THIS KEEN INTEREST DURING VISIT TO NETHERLANDS, WHERE WHITLAM MET WITH PRIME MINISTER DEN UYL. DUTCH, WEST GERMAN AND BRITISH EXPERTS REPORTEDLY WILL VISIT AUSTRALIA IN APRIL TO DISCUSS PROJECT.

2. EMBASSY COMMENT: WHILE TRIPARTITE MEMBERS HAVE LONG BEEN INTERESTED IN SELLING CENTRIFUGE TECHNOLOGY TO AUSTRALIANS FOR PROPOSED LOCAL PLANT, THEIR INTEREST IN FINANCING SUCH PLANT AND IN TAKING LARGE AMOUNTS OF PLANTS'S OUTPUT WOULD BE NEWS. SOURCE OF THESE REPORTS IS OBVIOUSLY SIR LENOX HEWITT, SECRETARY (PERMANENT HEAD), DEPARTMENT OF MINERALS AND ENERGY, WHO IS ACCOMPANYING WHITLAM. THESE INSPIRED PRESS REPORTS MAY BE GOA PLOY TO FORCE JAPANESE TO AGREE EXPEDITIOUSLY TO FINANCE AUSTRALIAN-OWNED ENRICHMENT PLANT HERE, A PROJECT GOJ RELUCTANTLY AGREED TO STUDY JOINTLY WITH GOA LAST NOVEMBER (REF A). HOWEVER, THERE MIGHT BE SOME SUBSTANCE TO PRESS ASSERTATIONS. MEANWHILE, HEWITT, WHO VISITED ALMELO FACILITY, HAS BURNISHED HIS REPUTATION AS THE LOYAL AND WILY AGENT OF NATIONALISTIC MINERALS AND ENERGY MINISTER CONNOR BY ALLEGEDLY TELLING PRESS "IT WOULD BE NICE" IF AUSTRALIAN ENRICHMENT PLANT WOULD REPLACE THE PROPOSED FOURTH U.S. DIFFUSION PLANT.

3. ACTION REQUESTED: EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE ANY AUTHORITATIVE INFORMATION ACTION ADDRESSEES MIGHT PROVIDE TO SUBSTANTIATE, REFUTE OR PLACE IN PROPER PERSPECTIVE REPORTED TRIPARTITE EAGERNESS TO FINANCE AUSTRALIAN ENRICHMENT FACILITY AND BUY MAJOR SHARE OF OUTPUT. GREEN

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